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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2257
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9279
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7534
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5369
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3692
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5294
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0155
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0133
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4416
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9840
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7129
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0150
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3992
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000027

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ELECTIONS UPDATE NO 7

REF: A. COLOMBO 21

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 11

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 7

[1](#)D. COLOMBO 2

[1](#)E. 09 COLOMBO 1152

[1](#)F. 09 COLOMBO 1145

[1](#)G. 09 COLOMBO 1139

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Classified By: CHARGE VALERIE C. FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

FONSEKA SUPPORTER KILLED

[1](#)1. (C)(Rel to UK, CAN, AUS, SWITZ.) Local media and the elections monitoring group CMEV reported that a bus carrying supporters of presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka in Tangalle, in the southern Hambantota District, was attacked by two gunmen on a motorcycle on January 12. A 58-year-old woman was reported killed and at least ten other persons injured. Fonseka was not in the vicinity at the time, and reports were that the group was on its way to a campaign rally organized in support of Fonseka by Sajith Premadasa, a member of parliament from the UNP. CMEV had reported to Post last week that the majority of violent incidents in the campaign so far had occurred in the Hambantota District. While President Rajapaksa comes from that district originally, it is also known as a hotbed of JVP activity. This is the first fatal incident during this election campaign. Unfortunately, fatalities have been a regular occurrence in past Sri Lankan elections. Post released a short statement later on January 12, expressing deep concern over the killing and calling on the government to investigate the incident. The release received wide coverage in local press, and President Rajapaksa also released his own statement condemning the killing. Police stated they had identified a suspect in the killing and expected to apprehend him quickly.

12. (C)(Rel to UK, CAN, AUS, SWITZ.) Following a week of fairly strong and outspoken actions, Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake appeared to weaken in his efforts to try to ensure a free and fair election. Media reported on January 13 that he had in fact threatened to quit because government officials were not carrying out his orders. While he appears to have backed away from that threat, Post counterparts at several other missions are concerned that he may be reluctant to press authorities on elections law violations. The Commissioner has no real enforcement power of his own, and must rely on the police and civil servants to carry out his instructions, and a sort of bully pulpit of public announcements.

FONSEKA ADDRESSES BUSINESS LEADERS

13. (C)(Rel to UK, CAN, AUS, SWITZ.) General Fonseka held a political meeting with 1,000-plus prominent Sri Lankan business community members on January 12 in Colombo. Fonseka stood in front of a full-color banner which read "Change We Can All Trust," but appeared awkward and unsure of himself in front of the business community. Fonseka gave a 15-minute speech that was designed to address business issues, but did not appear very confident when speaking on more specific economic concerns. During his short speech, Fonseka repeated the word "change" multiple times, with loud applause from the audience. After Fonseka's speech, questions from attendees were answered primarily by UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, who answered confidently and displayed an ease with humor and

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savvy that Fonseka had lacked. One UNP insider told PolOff that Fonseka had asked UNP Wickremesinghe to answer the majority of the questions at this event since Fonseka did not consider himself an expert on this subject. A copy of Fonseka's manifesto in English was passed out to all those attending. Apart from Ranil, other high-level members of the alliance present at the event were Mangala Samraweera (SLFP-M), Mano Ganesan (DPF), Rauff Hakeem (SLMC) and Somawansa Amarasinghe (JVP). TNA leader Sampanthan was not present.

14. (C)(Rel to UK, CAN, AUS, SWITZ.) Although his speech was thin on specific economic policy details, the large crowd of business community leaders gave Fonseka a standing ovation. They praised him as "a simple man" who was "grounded" and believed like him that the country needed change. Interestingly, in his first appearance with the business community, JVP leader Amarasinghe not only sat on stage at the event with Fonseka and Wickremesinghe but also fielded some of the audience questions. Amarasinghe concluded the meeting by giving a well received speech in Sinhala. (NOTE: The JVP, founded on Marxist ideology, has never been historically close to the business community. END NOTE.) The crowd appeared to enjoy watching the dynamics between the UNP and JVP leaders, and Amarasinghe joked with the audience about his unlikely presence.

FOWLER